



GIFTS

Rete di studi di Genere, Intersex, Femministi, Transfemministi e sulla Sessualità

GIFTS – The Italian Network of Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist and Sexuality Studies stands up against the 13th World Congress of Families and expresses its concerns and indignation about the participation of the Minister for Education, University and Research, Marco Bussetti.

GIFTS – The Italian Network of Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist and Sexuality Studies, includes over 200 academic and independent researchers affiliated to research centres, associations, study programmes, journals and laboratories embedded in the above-mentioned fields of study. Upon gathering in Bari on March 22-23, 2019 at the conference “Studying Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Academia”, GIFTS members express their concerns and indignation regarding the 13th World Congress of Families, scheduled for March 29-31, 2019, in Verona.

So-called “pro-life” and “pro-family” claims at the core of the 13th World Congress of Families constitute, together with racist security policies targeting migrants, the tools through which today’s sovereignist, populist and nationalist political forces are building up an illiberal front – one that threatens, among other items, academic freedom.

In this respect, the Hungarian case is significant, as Viktor Orbàn's country hosted the 11th edition of the same Congress in 2017, and stopped funding and accrediting national MA Programmes of Gender Studies in 2018.

The institutional support to the Congress is alarming, as it is the participation of Matteo Salvini, Minister of Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, and of Lorenzo Fontana, Minister for Family and Disability. Equally worrisome is the participation of Marco Bussetti, Minister for Education, University and Research. Since the start of his mandate, Minister Bussetti, through his continuing support to the demands of those "anti-gender" movements that are now promoting the 13th World Congress of Families, has been delegitimizing the democratic principles upon which a public, secular and democratic education system is built.

"Anti-gender" movements, by means of a mystifying and pseudo-scientific campaign aimed at turning prejudice into common sense and presenting the latter as the insurmountable limit of research and politics, argue that supranational, European and international institutions are controlled by feminist and "homosexualist" lobbies whose purported goal is to destroy sexual difference and to create a "new man" with no identity. What they call "gender theory" or "gender ideology" – they have coined these neologisms to counter the achievements of feminist and LGBTQI+ movements as well as our research practices – is held responsible for rejecting the biological difference between male and female, thereby denying the "beauty" and "value" of the "natural" family order based on the sacred union between a man and a woman.

We as GIFTS – The Italian Network of Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist and Sexuality Studies – denounce the ideological and instrumental deployment by these movements of the concept of "nature", in order to restrict freedoms and rights. We declare to be against the institutional support that has been awarded to such an antiscientific and dangerous initiative as the 13th World Congress of Families. We remind the following: that divorce and access to abortion are not social plagues, but fundamental rights; that such categories as homophobia and transphobia have not been invented by an alleged "single thought Newspeak", but constitute serious forms of oppression; that gender equality and antidiscrimination educational programmes, as well as our own fields of study, are no aberrations of the school and University systems, but occasions to promote respect for diversity and to develop free, secular and pluralistic thinking.

To the "anti-gender" movements, to the institutions supporting them and to the Italian Ministers, we respond that Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist and Sexuality Studies are not neutral knowledges, for no knowledge is neutral. Because they acknowledge self-determination as a value, such fields of study aim at promoting the establishment, protection and extension of spaces of freedom for all marginalized subjects, as well as countering all forms of oppression and discrimination.

Based on these principles, in defense of the scientific (though not neutral) character of our investigations, and in response to the attacks we are increasingly confronted with as researchers in our fields, we as GIFTS – The Italian Network of Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist and Sexuality Studies – express our concern and indignation regarding the 13th World Congress of Families (Verona, March 29-31, 2019), and denounce in particular the participation of Minister Bussetti. We strongly side with the mobilizations against the World Congress of Families, which have been launched by Non Una Di Meno and consist in cultural and political public events and demonstrations taking place during the days of the Congress to protest it.

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